

NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE

1201 15th Street, NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC 20005-2800

Elder Abuse Information Series N^o. 3

Reporting of Elder Abuse in Domestic Settings¹

The Problem of Elder Abuse

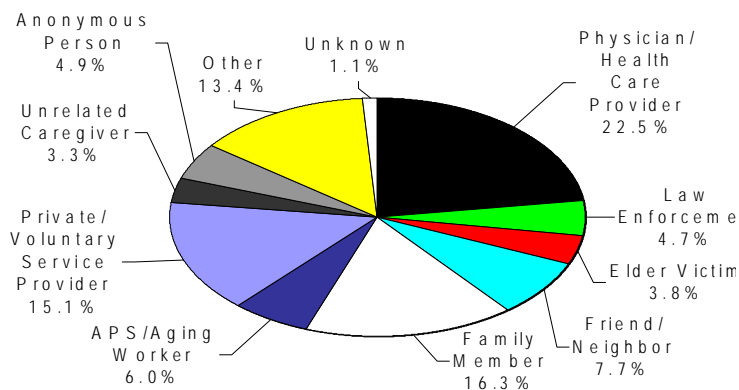
Elder abuse in domestic settings -- i.e., in a person's own home, apartment or other non-institutional living arrangement -- is a serious problem, affecting hundreds of thousands of elderly people across the country. The problem is largely hidden under the shroud of family secrecy. The signs of elder abuse are not recognized, leading to gross under-reporting of the problem.

The true national incidence or prevalence of elder abuse is not known although various studies have attempted to enumerate the size of the problem. In 1991, for example, researchers estimated that 2.5 million people were victims of various forms of elder abuse. This figure was adjusted in 1996, based on state reporting data, suggesting there were approximately 1.01 million abused elders in the country -- perhaps 2.16 million if self neglecting elders were added to the estimate.² It is widely accepted that these data help to illuminate the seriousness of the problem; however, no one can say exactly how many cases of elder abuse there are in this country each year.

Reporting Requirements

▪ **Mandatory reporters.** In all states but eight, certain types of professionals are designated as mandatory reporters of domestic elder abuse. They are required by law to report suspected cases of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. In 1996, 22.5 percent of all domestic elder abuse reports came from health care providers while another 15.1 percent came

Reporters of Domestic Elder Abuse



¹This Informational report was researched and written by Toshio Tatara, Ph.D. and Lisa M. Kuzmeskus, M.A. for the National Center on Elder Abuse Grant No. 90-am-0660 (Washington, DC: May 1996) and updated November 1997 by Edward Duckhorn.

²Tatara, Toshio and Lisa Kuzmeskus, *Summaries of Statistical Data on Elder Abuse in Domestic Settings for FY 95 and FY 96* (Washington, DC: National Center on Elder Abuse, 1997).

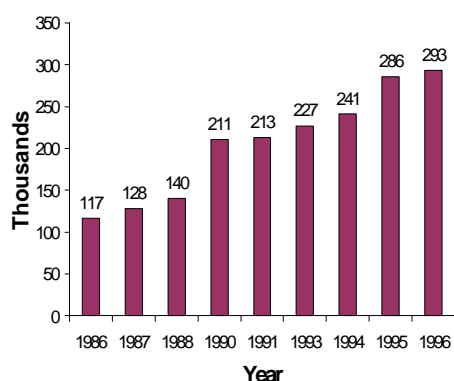
The National Center on Elder Abuse is a partnership of the National Association of State Units on Aging (NASUA); the Commission on Legal Problems of the Elderly of the American Bar Association (ABA); the Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly (CANE) of the University of Delaware; the San Francisco Consortium for Elder Abuse Prevention of the Goldman Institute on Aging (GIOA); the National Association of Adult Protective Services Administrators (NAAPSA); and the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA). Support for the National Center on Elder Abuse is provided by the U.S. Administration on Aging under grant number 90-AP-2144.

from service providers (i.e., staff of agencies providing services to the elderly). Additionally, family members and relatives of victims reported 16.3 percent of all reported cases of domestic elder abuse. Friends and neighbors, law enforcement personnel, clergy, banks/business institutions, and elder abuse victims also made reports.

- **Report-receiving agencies.** State laws addressing elder abuse designate various agencies to receive and to investigate reports of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. In 1996, there were 67 State laws (of a possible 71 laws) that designated report-receiving agencies. The types of agencies most frequently designated to be report receiving agencies are State adult protective service human service agencies; local adult protective service social service agencies; and law enforcement agencies.

- **Substantiation of reports.** The majority of elder abuse reports are substantiated after investigations. In 1996, 64.2 percent of all reports made were substantiated: 31.7 percent were self-neglect cases, 25.4 percent were cases of abuse by others, 7.1 percent were unknown.

- **Reports of abuse.** From 1986 to 1996 there has been a steady increase in the reporting



of domestic elder abuse nationwide: 117,000 reports in 1986; 128,000 reports in 1987; 140,000 reports in 1988; 211,000 reports in 1990; 213,000 reports in 1991; 227,000 reports in 1993; 241,000 reports in 1994; 286,000 reports in 1995; and 293,000 reports in 1996.

This 1996 figure represents an increase of 150.4 percent since 1986.

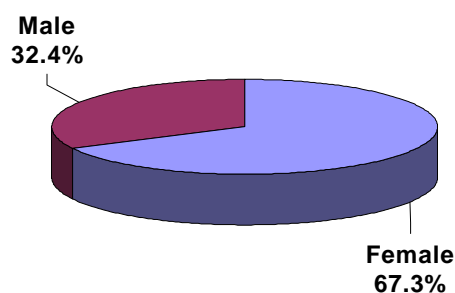
Characteristics of Victims

- **Age of victims.** The median age of elder abuse victims was 77.9 years, according to 1996 data that excluded self-neglecting elders. The median age of self-neglecting elders was 77.4 for the same year.

- **Race/ethnicity of victims.** In 1996, 66.4 percent of the victims of domestic elder abuse were white, while 18.7 percent were black. Hispanic elders accounted for 10.4 percent of the domestic elder abuse victims in the same year. The proportions of Native Americans and Asian American/Pacific Islander were each less than 1 percent.

- **Sex of victims.** The majority of elder abuse victims are female. In 1996, 67.3 percent of all reports of abuse involved female victims, while 32.4 percent of the reports pertained to male victims.

Sex of Victims of Elder Abuse



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